

VISIT...

Control Cholla Cactus

Guide B-804

Kirk McDaniel¹

Cooperative Extension Service • College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

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Cholla, often called tree cactus, walkingstick cholla, or cane cactus, is widely distributed throughout most areas of New Mexico. It is a tree-like plant growing to 8 ft tall with cylindrical joints 1 in. in diameter and 3–5 in. long. Spines are numerous and about 1 in. long. Cholla flowers are purple and mature into yellow fruit. The fruit drops to the ground when ripe, producing new plants. Cholla also can reproduce from terminal joints that fall to the ground and root when moisture is available.

Cholla often becomes a problem on rangeland when the grass cover is depleted by drought and over-utilization. After establishment, the cactus encroaches upon valuable range until dense thickets develop. These thickets hinder livestock operations and compete with needed forage for moisture and nutrients. Thick stands often result in livestock becoming “cholla eaters.”

MECHANICAL METHODS

Hand Grubbing

You can control cholla easily by “grubbing” with a pick mattock. Cut the main root 2–4 in. below the ground level and remove the plant from the area. If you clear the area carefully, regrowth should be confined to young plants not yet visible. Pile the grubbed plants and let them dry. Don’t scatter broken joints, as sprouting may occur. Prevent sprouting around the piled cholla by burning the piles when dry. Grubbing during winter or droughty years reduces reinfestation from scattered joints.

Mechanical Grubbing

You can mechanically uproot cholla plants by mounting a toothed fork on a front-end loader of a tractor. The fork is slipped under the plant and gently lifted until the cactus is uprooted. The bucket should be tilted to catch as many of the broken joints as possible. Two or three plants can be uprooted before dumping.

Mechanical grubbing is not always successful because heavy reinfestation may occur if the tractor operator is not careful. When lifting the cholla from the soil, don’t scatter the joints. Choose the best year for grubbing to allow the greatest chance for success. The cactus is more likely to dry if grubbed in December or January or in droughty summers.

CHEMICAL METHODS

Precautions

Follow directions on the USDA-approved labels on the container to prevent danger from chemical residue. Avoid drift to foliage of nearby susceptible crops. Do not spray when wind velocity is high. Do not use the same equipment to apply insecticides on crop plants, flowers, or vegetables.

Recommended Solutions

Foliage spray. Excellent results have been obtained from a solution of one part 2,4-DP, three parts diesel oil, and 20 parts water. Kills range from 95 to 100 percent. The number of gallons of mix varies with the density and size of the plants, but 1 gallon usually covers 14–20 plants.

¹ Former Extension Range Specialist, Department of Animal and Range Sciences, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

